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Stable Triglossia at Larteh, Ghana*

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1. Introduction

Charles Ferguson (1959) established the term diglossia to refer to a type of language situation characterized by a particular division of communicative functions between a vernacular and a superposed variety which are considered in the community to be varieties of the same language. In a diglossic situation the vernacular is used for ordinary conversation and the superposed variety for written and most formal spoken purposes. The type situation for diglossia is the Arab world where the terms are colloquial and classical Arabic respectively.

Triglossia refers to a type of language situation characterized by a similar division of communicative functions among three language varieties, a vernacular and two superposed varieties, one of which is an indigenous lingua franca and the other an introduced world language. The three varieties are not necessarily even related. This type of language situation is becoming increasingly noticeable in Africa and is typified in East Africa where numerous vernaculars are in a triglossic relationship with Swahili and English.[1]

In this paper the language situation at Larteh, Ghana, is described. This situation is of comparative interest because it is a West African instance of triglossia and because it is the result of gradual change over a long period. In addition, some implications are suggested for the theoretical and applied interests of macro-level sociolinguistics.

First, the language situation at Larteh provides a glimpse of the future in that it represents an advanced developmental stage of language contact which may lie in the future of other, currently less stable, situations, certain social factors being equal. Second, the widespread incidence of language situations in Africa similar enough to be typed together as triglossic suggests the existence of some universal dimensions of language situations. Both of these points are relevant to questions such as Eric Apronti asked at the African Linguistics Conference last year: "How should a multilingual society such as Ghana cope...with all the languages in use on her territory?" (Apronti 1974:1).

2. The Language situation at Larteh

The town of Larteh is picturesquely situated on the Akwapim Ridge in southern Ghana, about 35 miles north of Accra, with a

population of seven thousand. The economic base of the community is agricultural; there is no industry. In 1960, 60% of the population over six years of age had had some schooling and at present, school attendance is nearly universal among school-age children. Larteh is the hometown of the Larteh ethnic group, who number about thirty thousand. For various reasons, but particularly as a result of the cocoa migration, most Lartehs are resident outside of Larteh, but it is still considered their hometown.

The data on which this description is based were collected at Larteh during the academic year 1969-70. An interview survey on language use, the Linguistic Survey of Larteh (hereafter LSL), was conducted in November, 1969, on a random sample of 330 persons ten years of age and older. Larteh was also the site of a social anthropological study by David Brokensha (1966).

A language situation is the total configuration of language use in a community (Ferguson 1966:309). An adequate description of a language situation must identify the language varieties (at some level of fineness) in the linguistic repertoire of the community, describe their distribution by use and by user, as well as community attitudes to the varieties and their distribution, and the direction and rate of change in the situation.

The following description of the language situation at Larteh covers these areas in broad outline and within-language variation is largely ignored. A more extensive treatment can be found in Johnson (1973) and see also Brokensha (1966).

2.1. Repertoire. A large number of languages are spoken by the population of Larteh. Table 1 lists those claimed by the LSL respondents. The three principal terms in the situation are the Larteh dialect of Hill Guan, the Akuapem Twi dialect of Akan, and English.

TABLE 1.
Community Linguistic Repertoire (Percentage of LSL sample claiming most widespread languages)

Language	Total sample N = 330	Lartehs N = 286
Hill Guan	93	100
Akan	98	98
English	49	46
Ga	33	33
Adangme	18	19
Ewe	10	8
Hausa	5	4
(also French, Latin, Dagbani, Nzema, Kotokoli, Dagari, Buem, Coastal Guan, Sahwi, Yoruba, Basare, Greek).		

The Guan languages are spoken in a number of discontiguous areas in Ghana and neighboring countries. Hill Guan comprises the three mutually intelligible dialects of Larteh, Kyerepon, and Anum-Boso. Hill Guan is not a written language, has no official recognition and is not used in the schools, and essentially all of its speakers also speak Akan.

Akan is the predominant language of southern Ghana, spoken as first language by 40% of the population of Ghana and widely spoken as a second language. There are three standard forms: Fante, Asante Twi, and Akuapem Twi. It has a respectable amount of published literature, serves as a medium of instruction in the first years of primary school in some areas, and is taught as a subject through the university level. Akuapem Twi is one of the nine Ghanaian languages and dialects chosen for promotion by the government through the Bureau of Ghana Languages.

English is a major world language and the official language of Ghana. It is taught as a subject at all levels of the educational system and is the medium of instruction after the first years of primary school.

Larteh is the first language learned and the language known best by almost all Lartehs.[2] Twi begins to be learned in early childhood and some children are fluent in it by the time they enter school. It is said that on completing primary school a Larteh child is not identifiable as such by his Twi. The locus of acquisition of English is essentially restricted to the schools. Other African languages are learned primarily as a result of residence outside Larteh in areas where these languages are spoken. French and Latin are taught as subjects at the secondary level.

Table 2 shows the incidence of individual repertoire patterns in the LSL sample.

TABLE 2.
Individual Linguistic Repertoires
(LSL sample, Lartehs only, percentages)

L	2%	Larteh only
LT	33%	Larteh and Twi
LTO	19%	Larteh, Twi, and Other
LTE	22%	Larteh, Twi, and English
LTOE	23%	Larteh, Twi, Other, and English

(note: Other = one or more languages other than Larteh, Twi, or English.)

2.2. Functional distribution. The functional distribution of languages at Larteh is of course not random. Table 3 presents a tabulation of the responses to a number of LSL questions concerning the use of languages in certain contexts. N equals the number of respondents answering the question, and it is this

number on which the percentages are based. Thus, assuming the sample is representative, the claim is not that 94% of Lartehs are literate in Twi but rather that 94% of the literates are literate in Twi. The low level of claimed use of other languages in these contexts supports the position that of the large number of languages in use at Larteh, only three are major terms.

The data in Table 3 can be accounted for by a set of rules predicting language choice in speech events in the community. These functional rules are of three types: a repertoire rule, situational rules, and metaphorical rules.

The repertoire rule is this: of the languages known by the participants in a speech event, that one will be used in which they have the highest level of proficiency. The actual realization of the repertoire rule at Larteh is basically as follows:

> Lartehs speak - Larteh with Lartehs;
> Twi with Akans;
> and, if known, Adangme with Adangmes,
> English with non-Africans, etc.,
> otherwise Twi.

This rule correctly predicts language choice in the great majority of speech events at Larteh. In particular, it largely accounts for the data on the right-hand two-thirds of Table 3.

Situational rules account for language choice in classes of situations which are systematically exceptions to the repertoire rule. Two major areas where this is the case are the schools and the Christian churches.

Language use in the schools is dictated by guidelines originating with the Ministry of Education. The medium of instruction during the first three years of primary school is Twi, with English taught as a subject. After the third year, English becomes the medium of instruction and Twi is taught as a subject. Larteh is in theory never, and in practice rarely, used in class or at other school functions, and is more or less discouraged at informal activities at the schools. At the secondary school, use of any language other than English is actively discouraged on the campus, with the exception of language classes in Twi, French, and Latin.

Most Lartehs are Christians and there are perhaps a dozen denominations represented at Larteh. Larteh is not used at formal church activities. Twi is the language of services and most formal activities. The Bible is commonly read in Twi, though also available in English. Watchtower magazine is distributed in its Twi edition. Religious services at the secondary school are of course in English.

A related phenomenon concerns the language of songs. There is a stereotype, held by Lartehs and non-Lartehs alike, that Larteh cannot be used for singing. While there are some exceptions, it is generally true that Lartehs sing in Twi or English. The songs associated with traditional religious ceremonies are largely Twi. Many of the folktales told at Larteh have associated songs as refrains, speeches, and so forth. These songs are always in Twi, even when the tales are told in Larteh. Hymns at the

Presbyterian church are in Twi, while the Methodists use an English hymnal. Similarly, Twi is the language of the talking drums at Larteh.

The data in Table 3 can be accounted for by the repertoire rule and situational rules like those described above. Thus, the mixture of languages reported for the market context reflects the interaction there of people of varying linguistic backgrounds; that is, the repertoire rule is operative rather than a situational rule requiring multilingualism in that context. On the other hand, a situational rule is operative when Twi is used in a Christian church context even though all participants may be Lartehs.

While the residue of speech events to be accounted for is small, one further set of rules must be mentioned. These metaphorical rules take account of the fact that language choice is meaningful. The meaning that choice of a particular language has reflects and reinforces the usual uses of the language. When a language is chosen in a situation outside its normal range of use these meanings are conveyed. Briefly, a switch from English to Twi or Larteh, or from Twi to Larteh, can convey intimacy, solidarity, or levity. Switching to Larteh can stress loyalty to hometown or ethnic group. A switch from Larteh to Twi, or from Larteh or Twi to English, can stress education or affiliation with wider reference groups.

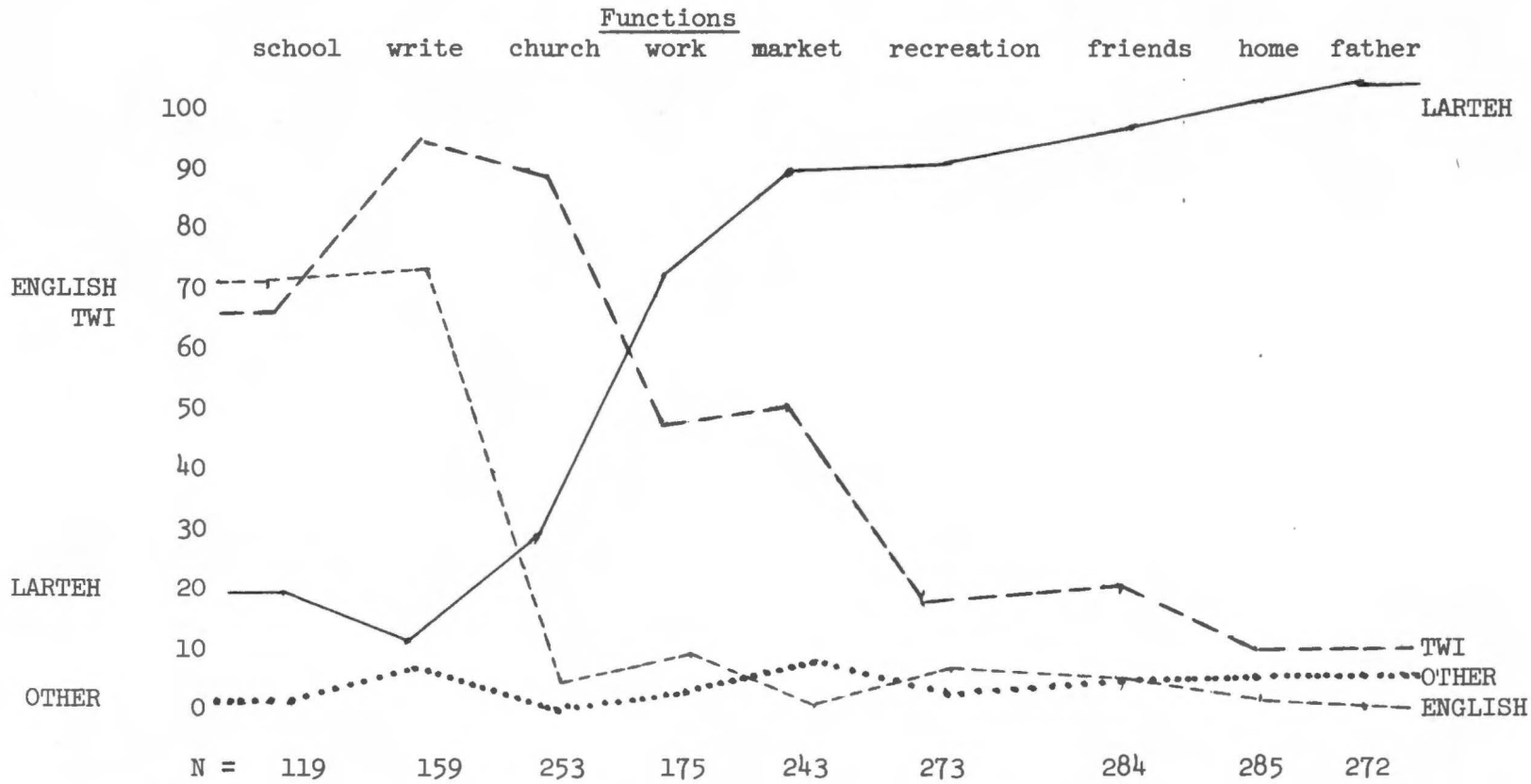
2.3. Demographic distribution. The distribution of languages in the community also patterns with regard to demographic factors, the most obvious of which is ethnic group. Non-Lartehs generally do not know Larteh. This is true even of those who have been resident at Larteh for a considerable period of time and reflects the fact that Twi is always available as a medium of communication with Lartehs. Among Lartehs, the principal demogrpahic difference is the obvious one that educated people are more likely to know English. There are also age and sex differences, largely due to the higher level of education among males and younger people. There is a tendency among educated people toward more extensive use of languages other than Larteh, but this can be accounted for by the functional rules without reference to demographic factors.

2.4. Attitudes. Language attitudes at Larteh reflect an acceptance of the existing language situation. Positive attitudes are expressed toward the languages most commonly known and used in the community.

The attitude of Lartehs toward Larteh is one of loyalty to the mother tongue, the language of their town, the marker of their ethnic identity, and their first language with which they feel most comfortable. This loyalty is, however, much less in evidence in non-Larteh contexts. The fact that the areas of appropriateness and utility of their mother tongue are restricted arouses little resentment. Efforts to raise the status of Larteh, as by developing an orthography, are infrequent and not associated with any negative feeling toward Twi, English, or any other language.

Lartehs share the Akuapems' pride in their dialect of Akan and the stereotype, "Here in Akwapim we speak the best Twi", is

TABLE 3.
Functional Distribution of Languages (LSL sample, Lartehs only, percentages)



(Note: The varying N, on which the percentages are based, reflects the distribution of roles through the community.)

also heard at Larteh. English is universally regarded as a prestigious and useful language.

Negative attitudes expressed toward certain Ghanaian languages reflect community attitudes toward the ethnic groups commonly associated with those languages. Such negative attitudes are infrequent and in fact nearly half the LSL respondents indicated that there was no language they did not like.

2.5. Change. The language situation at Larteh appears relatively stable. There is no indication that any of the three major terms in the community repertoire is being replaced, nor that any additional language will increase in use to an extent warranting treatment as a fourth major term. Language attitudes and the pattern of language acquisition also appear stable.

The development of the current situation has been gradual. While the introduction of English is relatively recent, Guan-Akan bilingualism at Larteh has obtained for a long time. Thus, the missionary Riis (1854:3) observed that bilingualism was already universal among adult Hill Guans in the 1840's.

There is some current change in the distribution of the terms in the population. Most notably, knowledge and use of English are increasing, reflecting the increased incidence of education. Another area of change is the increasing dominance of English over Twi as a language of literacy, paralleling the decreasing emphasis on the teaching of Ghana languages in the schools.

3. Conclusions

Beyond its comparative interest, the descriptive material presented above illustrates some more general aspects of language situations in Africa.

Returning to Apronti's question, I would like to call attention to the "rowing downstream" principle in language planning recently discussed by Ralph Fasold (1974). Briefly, this principle holds that directed change in language situations is most likely to be effective when it attempts to influence people to do what they are prepared to do anyway. How can we know what people are prepared to do? One way is to find out what they have done in the past and what they are doing now. Stated this way, the importance of the collection of basic descriptive data for language planning is appropriately underscored.

The data presented here suggest the following implications for the descriptive study of language situations and thus for language planning.

Change in language situations may be displacive or additive. The situation at Larteh is clearly the result of additive change. It may be hypothesized that at some point in the past Larteh was a monolingual agricultural village. In a real sense this village still exists at Larteh as the functional domain of the Larteh language (family, fellow townsmen, farming, traditional religion). The use of languages other than Larteh is restricted to contexts that are in one sense or another introduced.

Additive change has resulted in triglossia at Larteh, and this tendency is widely observable elsewhere in Africa. Language situations in nations and regions are often triglossic, or incipiently triglossic, and this pattern is increasingly apparent in community and individual repertoires as well.

This trend suggests the existence of three levels of communication in Africa. These levels are (A) local, (B) regional, and (C) (inter)national, and they are associated with vernaculars, indigenous lingua francas, and introduced world languages respectively. In this view, as individual role repertoires expand, there is a corresponding expansion of linguistic repertoires that naturally tends toward triglossia.

Prediction of what people are prepared to do would be the test of a general theory of (change in) language situations. If the notion "level of communication" has predictive value, then it should have a place in such a theory. Nida and Wonderly (1971) have, in fact, made just such a proposal; that is, that there are present in all language situations three "major communication roles" which may be realized through one, two, or three languages.

That this three-level pattern is widespread in Africa appears to be largely due to two factors. Linguistic diversity coupled with a high degree of intercommunication has led to the importance of B, and certain well-known factors of political history have led to the importance of C. However, other patterns may be more frequent in other areas. Gumperz (1961), for example, has suggested a four-level model for social communication in South Asia.[3]

Language functions, in the sense of contexts of normal or expected use, is a distinct notion from that of level of communication, though there are more or less natural associations of functions with levels. This can be illustrated by a comparison of the functions associated with the major terms in the triglossic situations in Kenya and Tanzania.[4]

In conclusion, the rowing downstream principle and the view of language situations presented here suggest that language planners should concentrate on helping people to expand their linguistic repertoires. As Whiteley (1971:13) has said, "It is role and code versatility that is rewarding, and role and code limitation that impoverishes". The major terms should be allowed to choose themselves and changes in situational rules should be limited to minor adjustments in the functional balance among the terms.[5]

Footnotes

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[1]On triglossia, see Abdulaziz Mkilifi (1972) for Tanzania and Whiteley (1973) for Kenya. O'Barr's description of the language

situation in a rural Tanzanian community (1971) provides an interesting comparison with the data presented here.

[2]Henceforth, unless otherwise indicated, the focus of discussion will be restricted to Lartehs.

[3]Situations with two major terms are also common in Africa, particularly where the A and B levels are associated with the same language. This is the case in those areas of Ghana where Akan is the predominant mother tongue. Situations with four major terms also exist.

The discussion in this paper has been largely limited to the major terms in language situations. Other languages are of two types: minor languages associated with restricted situational rules, as French and Latin at Larteh, and miscellaneous languages acquired by individuals as a result of particular facts of personal history and not associated with any situational rule, as Adangme and Ewe at Larteh.

[4]Comparisons of this sort suggest that language functions may be arranged on a scale according to the strength of their association with levels A or C. The poles of this scale would be informal conversation in the home and university lectures respectively. Functions normally associated with level B would be those in the center of the scale. Cf. Table 3. It would follow from this that the languages associated with levels A and C are never directly in conflict.

[5]For an interesting language planning study very much in line with these suggestions, see Tadadjeu (1975).

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